CHAPTER VI:
ROADS AND TRAILS OF THE PARK

The Trail Ridge Road, which traversed Rocky Mountain National Park and joined Estes Park with Grand Lake, was to become the apex of the Park's road system. It was constructed during the early 1930's. Yet before describing that remarkable accomplishment, it is appropriate to consider the development of some of the other roads leading to and lying within the Park area. When Joel Estes came to the Park in 1859, he traveled an old trapper's trail up to the St. Vrain River, over the mountains to the Little Thompson River, and then through Muggins Gulch and over Park Hill. This was probably the most popular trail into the region despite the existence of several other passable traces. After moving his family to the Park, Estes improved the road to accommodate four-wheeled vehicles. But still it was a road only in name, and a trail in fact. Some further improvements, of a minor kind, were later made by Griff Evans and Rocky Mountain Jim Nugent, as for example when they cut brush and removed stones along the route. Nevertheless, pioneers found that negotiating this "road" could be an adventure. [1]

In 1875 Alexander Q. MacGregor obtained a grant from the territorial legislature to build and maintain a toll road into Estes Park, adjacent to the St. Vrain River. It began at the base of a huge sandstone rock, called Steamboat Rock, near the present town of Lyons, Colorado. MacGregor formed the Estes Park Wagon Road Company to carry out road construction, and after its work was completed, he organized (in 1879) the Estes Park Toll Road Company. Some years later he sold his road to a group of Longmont businessmen. Until 1900 the new owners periodically encountered operational problems, particularly when they tried to hike toll charges. Local teamsters challenged these moves and eventually carried their case to the State Supreme Court, which decided against the owners' right to the increase.

The Bald Mountain Road was Estes Park's first free approach road. [2] Begun in 1876, it connected Loveland to Estes Park. Fred and Abner Sprague started a stage line over this route, but discontinued the run after they were awarded a mail contract for deliveries from Lyons to the Moraine Park post office in 1890. The original Bald Mountain Road was forty miles long. Always a free road, it was used until after the turn of the century. [3]

The present Big Thompson Canyon Road, connecting Loveland with Estes Park, was the first planned approach road, for it was born of blueprints rather than trial and error. Former Estes Park sheriff, C. H. Bond, convinced the county commissioners in 1902 that a road could be built through the "Narrows." W. A. Riley was awarded the construction contract

for $24,000, and the money for the project was raised through private subscription and county aid. When completed in 1904, the road was dusty and narrow with many bridges and steep inclines. At times, though, a horse-drawn stage line and a fleet of Stanley Steamers used this approach, even though for several years only enough maintenance work was performed on it to keep it passable. It remained a "one-way track" until 1919, when the county and state began to make widening improvements on it. [4]

Yet another "highway" into Estes Park was the South St. Vrain Road, which ran past the Longs Peak Inn, then dropped down into Estes Park beyond Mary's Lake. From 1892 until 1900 the portion of the road extending from Lyons to Allenspark was a toll road. Until 1932, Larimer County maintained the road. [5]

After the creation of Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915, superintendents became primarily concerned with the maintenance of roads and trails within the Park's boundaries. Originally, there were only five miles of such roads under federal jurisdiction, but even so, Supervisor Trowbridge was hard pressed to maintain them under his 1915 appropriation of $3,000. The other fifty miles of Park roads fell under state or county jurisdiction. All the roads had been built by pioneers and named for nearby geographic landmarks, such as Mill Creek, Beaver Creek, Bear Lake, and Copeland Lake. Without exception these roads were mere trails, almost always in poor condition.

By far the most famous (some might say infamous) road in the National Park was the state-owned Fall River Road. It was originally constructed with convict labor in 1914 from a point near the present Fall River Entrance of the Park (about four miles "as the crow flies" northwest of Estes Park Village) to a distance of two miles within the current boundary of the Park. The road was generally well built, although in some places it was quite narrow, being only eight to ten feet in width. The point known as the "second switchback" was reached by a twelve per cent grade. It was not sufficiently wide for the average vehicle to change direction without a "see-saw" movement. This maneuver was extremely dangerous, since there was no barrier to prevent a vehicle from going over the embankment. In 1915, Park Supervisor Charles Russell Trowbridge recommended a complete survey of the road before extensive improvements were begun. As a stop-gap measure, however, a stone retaining wall was constructed on the switchback at a cost of $65,000. [6]

Preliminary planning called for extending the Fall River Road so as to connect it with the Grand County Road to the west. This latter road, finished in 1915, extended about one and three-fourths miles within the Park's western boundary. During the summer of 1915, Trowbridge studied the Fall River Road at first hand ten times, and then, because he lacked additional funds, contracted only to have the second switchback widened at a cost of $181.40. [7]

The National Park's 128 miles of trails in 1915 had been built by residents of the Estes Park region. These trails were constructed for protection of the forests against fires, rather than for tourist travel. The principal and most widely known of them led from Estes Park a distance of 18-1/2 miles to Grand Lake, via Flat Top Mountain. Other trails were located near Loch Vale, Bear Lake, Lawn Lake, Upsilon Lake, Fern Lake, Storm Pass, Bierstadt

Lake, and Longs Peak. All of the trails needed extensive improvements if they were to be used by Park visitors. In 1916, the Park administration expended over $300 on trail repairs. The necessary additional work was handicapped in the immediately following years because there was never enough money for it in the Park's appropriation. Reminiscing on his experiences as Superintendent, L. C. Way remembered, "We had scarcely any funds and had to blaze our trails through the forest on public contributions." [8]

In the fall of 1917, Acting Chief Ranger R. A. Kennedy summarized the Park's road and trail problem from the standpoint of finances:

> . . . numerous complaints on road conditions have been received in this office. Owing to a lack of funds, however, we were unable to remedy the situation. While none of the roads are dangerously defective at this time, they are rapidly growing worse. With each month's neglect the initial cost of maintenance will greatly increase, and unless funds are soon provided conditions will become so deplorable that pleasurable travel will be impossible.
>
> Very little trail work has been done . . . our allotment for this purpose having been almost exhausted earlier in the season in removing fallen timber and doing such work as was necessary to open up the Park. The limited amount of money provided for this purpose, however, spread over the vast acreage of this Park, was insufficient to enable us to make permanent repairs. [9]

The eastern, southern, and western approach roads to the Park were hardly in better shape than the Park's own roads. Due to the poor condition of the eastern approach roads from Fort Collins, Loveland, and Lyons, transportation was at times difficult, and the Park's supply of provisions and coal sometimes ran low and Park building operations were retarded.

The deterioration of the state and county roads within the Park presented difficulties to the authorities. The newly created National Park Service was prohibited by law from spending money for improvements or maintenance of non-federal roads. Furthermore, it was doubtful whether the Park administration could have done much, even if allowed to, to improve those roads. Acts of Congress passed on January 26, 1915 and February 14, 1917 provided that not more than $10,000 a year could be expended for administration, protection and improvements in Rocky Mountain National Park. Fortunately, however, the state and county authorities did some work to improve their roads. The Larimer County Commissioners agreed to expend $1,500 during 1918 to maintain their roads within the Park. Road camps located in Moraine Park sent out men to work on the Moraine Park, Fall River, Longs Peak, High Drive and Wind River roads. [10]

The Park Service also tried its hand at road improvement. One mile of road was constructed to connect the Mill Creek Road and the Old Glacier Basin Road. This extension provided "a safe and easy road" to the free public camping grounds in Glacier Basin. A right of way was cleared and all brush burned in the fall of 1917. Grading was completed in time to open the road to the public on July 4, 1918. [11] Private contributions of time and money helped spur

further road work. In one instance, Roe Emery of the Rocky Mountain Transportation Company took over the supervision of construction on the Fall River Road in May 1918. Road work between the Brinwood Hotel in Moraine Park and "the Pool" was financed partly by private subscription, as was the construction of a one-mile cut-off on the Glacier Basin Road.

The Park administration found that road maintenance was a never-ending struggle. Superintendent Way did his best to keep Park Service roads in passable condition. Due to extreme dryness of the climate, however, he found it "practically impossible" to do so, especially since there was inadequate drainage. In 1919, Way explained:

> We have done what we could to overcome this, but the small amount of money available for all road work permits only an infinitestimal amount of drainage work, and we must concentrate our efforts on dangerous stretches on bridges, making them passable and safe for the season . . . An examination shows that not one bridge within the National Park has a sufficient factor of safety for the travel carried. [12]

Fortunately, Congress took a hand to boost the allotments for the next fiscal year. By a law of March 1, 1919, the $10,000 ceiling on appropriations for Rocky Mountain National Park was raised to $60,000 for fiscal 1920. Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane explained that the $10,000 inhibition had been included in the organic act as an indication of the intention of Congress to do nothing more than maintain the Park until such time as it might be prepared to proceed with Park improvements. Since 1915, the Park had received appropriations totaling only $41,000. The popularity of the Park as a tourist attraction, however, prompted greater federal interest. In 1918, 101,497 visitors came to the Park. This heavy influx apparently convinced Congress that Rocky Mountain was a national park in fact as well as in name. Secretary Lane promised:

> Hereafter the park will be given essentially the same consideration by the Federal Government as is given to other parks of the first rank . . . [13]

About the same time, the Grand County Commissioners, who earlier had been uncooperative, agreed to support the building of the Fall River Road on the Park's west side. The state then assumed the responsibility for construction between Grand Lake and the Park boundary. Grand County in return promised to complete a separate five mile stretch for which the state had insufficient funds. The state agreed to reimburse the county at a later date. [14]

Superintendent Way, meanwhile, traveled to commercial clubs in Denver, Fort Collins, Loveland, and Boulder to explain the Park's road problems. As a result, every organization promised to help. Specifically, they agreed to "bend every effort" towards completing the Fall River Road. They even offered to help Way secure the necessary labor. These commercial clubs realized that the completion of this road would constitute an important tourist attraction. [15] By connecting Estes Park and Grand Lake over the Continental Divide, the Fall River Road would make possible a circle trip to and from Denver in three

days traveling time. The total distance for the trip was 213 miles. Colorado state officials also realized the value of such a road.

Work continued on the road during the summer of 1920, despite difficulties in finding and keeping men on the road gangs. Still, in September 1920, the 37 mile road was completed. Its highest point lay 11,797 feet above sea level. [16] In the words of one author, "it was not a road for timid drivers." [17]

While the Fall River Road project captured the limelight, the rest of the Park's road system received its due official attention. Widening, ditching, and surfacing kept local work crews busy. Much of the road maintenance consisted of removing boulders, of which there were thousands, to enable road gangs to grade and improve drainage conditions. Despite these problems, Acting Superintendent J. A. Shepherd could report in September 1921, "The end of the month found the roads in better condition, perhaps, than they have been in the history of the Park." [18]

Such diligent road maintenance came at a cost. By early spring, 1922, the Park's financial condition was precarious. Superintendent Roger Toll considered the balance of the regular appropriations insufficient for the minimum operation of the Park until the beginning of the new fiscal year on July 1. The Park was bailed out of its troubles by the State Highway Department. This agency paid back $4,000 for expenditures made by the Park Service the previous autumn on the Fall River Road. Even with this palliative, Toll worried that "only the most essential work can be done before July 1st, and the greater part must remain undone until that time." [19]

Some additional fiscal relief was in the offing, however. In April 1922, Colorado's Senator Lawrence C. Phipps announced that the Park appropriation was being increased for the coming fiscal year to $73,900. This sum represented a hike of $8,900 over the current fiscal year and $23,900 over fiscal 1921. The maintenance fund amounted to $53,000, and the rest was assigned for improvements. Superintendent Toll called the increase "very gratifying" and said that it showed that the Park Service, the Congress, and the people realized the "need for improvement of the facilities of this Park." [20]

Even with this appropriation, Toll could not afford frivolous spending. Only five men were employed on trail work during the summer season, and three of these were working without compensation, other than their board. This trail crew removed logs and other obstructions in the trail to Loch Vale and began work on a trail between Bear Lake and Lake Helene. Toll considered that "when funds become available for trail construction" a regular trail could be cleared between those two lakes. [21]

This skeleton trail outfit was supplemented by the men and teams of R. W. McQueary, who was employed by the Park Service but placed under the supervision of P. J. Becker of the State Highway Department. One road crew was located at Horseshoe Park and another at Poudre Lakes. A third crew had its headquarters near timberline on the Fall River Road. McQueary's men were veterans of the Fall River Road construction. The three crews made improvements on the Fall River and Moraine Park roads. These efforts, especially with

respect to the Fall River Road, were well received by the local press. The weekly Estes Park Trail assured its readers:

> We found that the switchbacks are being widened and safety retaining walls built so that there will be little danger of an unruly car plunging over a bank and the widening will permit all cars to make the curves without being compelled to back up. [22]

Consistently, state government spending over-shadowed that of the federal government. Between the time of the creation of the Park and the close of fiscal 1923, the federal government had spent $39,853 on road construction in Rocky Mountain National Park. All but $1,500 of this sum had been spent on the Fall River Road. In the same time period, federal funds totaling $50,768 had been allocated for road maintenance and $7,715 for construction and maintenance of trails. In comparison, the State Highway Department had spent $261,997.79 on Fall River Road construction alone. [23]

Even so, federal spending on improvements in Rocky Mountain National Park did not match federal expenditures in other National Parks. In the first eight years of the Park's existence, Washington had spent a total of $126,643 for improvements in the Park, less than the annual appropriations for improvements for some national parks. Appropriations for Yellowstone Park ran from $286,000 to $361,000 each year; Yosemite, from $200,000 to $300,000 yearly; and Glacier, $80,000 to $195,000. The Estes Park Trail blamed the federal government, not local park officials, for this "neglect." It claimed that

> Captain Way . . . and Superintendent Toll have both done all that was possible with the limited funds allowed them. The fault is in Washington. [24]

In 1924, Washington went a long way toward rectifying its neglect of roads in Rocky Mountain National Park—and other national parks as well. By April, Congress had authorized the expenditure of $7,500,000 over a three-year period to improve and construct roads in the national parks. While considering the resolution, Congress was presented with an impressive array of facts, to convince its members that roads had to be improved to accommodate the heavier Park travel. In 1923, the Committee on Public Lands reported that 1,230,886 people visited national parks, as compared with 235,193 in 1914. Yet, since 1916 when the National Park Service was created, Congress had spent only $1,443,600 in national parks to maintain roads and make a few absolutely necessary extensions. [25] Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work, in recommending the bill, pointed out that since 1872, when Yellowstone National Park was created, there had been appropriated for road construction in national parks $3,504,100. Of this total $1,482,000 had been spent in Yellowstone. [26]

The debate over the appropriation bill in 1924 marked the first time that the road requirements of the various Parks had been grouped into one program. Previously, each Park had submitted its estimates for road construction, along with other items of administration, protection, and maintenance. The results from this method had been

somewhat unsatisfactory. Therefore, when Congress approved the 1924 three-year road program, there was definite assurance of a marked improvement in the condition of the roads in Rocky Mountain National Park. It was to receive $445,000 of the appropriation. Roughly $300,000 was to be spent in reconstructing and improving existing roadways. Superintendent Toll explained:

> The plan is to first improve our present roads to a satisfactory condition before undertaking new construction . . . .
>
> On new work it is probable that no grade of more than 6 per cent will be used. On both new and old work we hope to obtain roads 20 feet wide. [27]

Surveys under the direction of the Park's Engineering Division were carried on during the summer, preparatory to advertising for bids and letting contracts for the work which was authorized for 1926 under the 1924 appropriation. [28]

Meanwhile under the 1925 appropriation, noticeable improvements were already being made at certain points on the Park's roads. Widening operations were carried out at the upper end of Horseshoe Park. At a higher elevation on the Fall River Road, two dangerously sharp rock curves were widened and made safe. The surfacing of the eastern side of the Fall River Road was begun with the aid of a portable rock crushing plant. The road at the Moraine Park hill was widened and the grade was improved. Parking spaces were constructed at Chasm Falls and at Bear Lake. A branch road was constructed from the Fall River Road, at the Estes Park Fish Hatchery, to the Aspenglen campground. Also, an eight-foot masonry arch culvert was built to carry this roadway across Bighorn Creek. [29]

The Park made provision for the protection and comfort of the road crews high on the Fall River Road. A stone building was erected east of Fall River Pass and was called Timberline Road Camp. Several times in previous years, road crews had been caught in "freak" late spring snow storms, but the camp building offered helpful protection for the future. [30]

To deal with the Park's impressive annual snowfall, a new experiment in snow removal was tried in 1925 on the Fall River Road. Annually, Park employees had had to cut a wagon road 12 miles through drifts as deep as 19 feet. In October 1924, 13 boxes of dynamite weighing 650 pounds, were placed at the point of the deepest drift on the road. These boxes were connected by a special type of hollow lead fuse, filled with TNT, which would explode them all simultaneously. This dynamite, when exploded on June 1, blew out a trench about 300 feet long, 15 feet wide and six feet deep. About 1,000 cubic yards of snow were removed in this way. A steam shovel, purchased concurrently for road work in the Park, was also used for snow removal. In addition, teams and hand shoveling work helped. The road was opened to travel on June 13, six days earlier than ever before. [31]

Improvements in park trails also took place. Most notable was the completion of the Boulderfield horse trail. Some years before, Ranger Dean Babcock had laid out and constructed the trail from the foot of the mountain to Timberline Cabin. Then a Park Service trail crew headed by Rangers Jack Moomaw and Curtis S. Skinner, completed the upper end

of the trail to Longs Peak. As a result, the trail had been extended almost the entire distance to the Boulderfield. [32]

With the beginning of fiscal 1926, Park officials were faced with the happy task of spending $140,500, the first installment of the Park's three year $445,000 road building budget. Of this amount, $40,000 was earmarked for the widening of the Fall River Road on the west side of Milner Pass. The Park administration allowed $20,000 for the reconstruction of the northern portion of the Highdrive Road, and the construction of two miles of new road from Deer Ridge to Horseshoe Park. This project included the building of a 24-foot reinforced concrete bridge, with masonry facing, across Fall River. Another $20,000 was to be used in the building of masonry and concrete bridges between Grand Lake and Milner Pass. Much of the remaining funds, $125,000, was saved for the reconstruction of the lower portion of the Glacier Basin Road leading to Bear Lake. Grades up to 14 percent had to be eliminated. By agreement with the Park Service, the Bureau of Public Roads supervised these major projects under the new appropriations. [33]

As mentioned previously, further appropriations for road building in the Park were suspended in a congressional committee, pending the outcome of the cede jurisdiction controversy. The suspension involved sums of $199,000 slated for 1927 and a $1,237,500 package to be spread out over a four-year period, 1929 to 1933. Road construction already in progress was to be carried to its conclusion, however. [34] When in March of 1929 Colorado's cession of her Park roads had been accepted by Congress, the way was paved for further appropriations. To this good news was added the completion of the newly reconstructed Bear Lake road in July. The Rocky Mountain News called the road

> a foretaste of what many future highways are to be like in the national parks . . . it presages a new era in the development of national parks for the pleasure of their citizen-owners. [35]

Ironically, Roger W. Toll, the persistent yet patient administrator who had supervised the improving of the Park's road system, did not witness the completion of this new road. In March of 1929, he was transferred to Yellowstone National Park. But before leaving, he handpicked as his successor, Edmund Rogers, a veteran of the U. S. Geological Survey and the Colorado Mountain Club. Rogers' appointment "was not a surprise in Denver." He had been personally endorsed by Senators Phipps and Waterman, as well as other prominent Coloradans. [36]

Though at the time of his appointment he was a junior officer in the Colorado National Bank, Rogers was no stranger to the history and problems of the Park. National parks had been a "sort of hobby" with him. He knew Stephen Mather and Horace Albright well and "had been in on" the campaign to establish Rocky Mountain National Park. His brother was James Grafton Rogers who authored the bill creating the Park. Furthermore, Edmund Rogers "had grown up" with the Tolls. He and Roger Toll had traversed most of Rocky Mountain National Park by foot on weekend trips. [37]

Rogers was not apprehensive about following his successful friend as superintendent. [38]

He later recalled that when he assumed his duties as superintendent, he faced many difficulties. Officials of the Forest Service were antagonistic and some of the old opponents of the transportation monopoly were still active. Clem Yore, whom Rogers later remembered as "crazy as a bed bug," warned the new superintendent that, if he had his way, he would have him fired. Rogers recalled that in Estes Park village there were those "who wanted to come to the trough." [39] To help him overcome his difficulties, Rogers counted on Chief Ranger John McLaughlin, recently transferred from Yellowstone, and John Preston, newly appointed Assistant Superintendent. Park Service officials had deemed it wise to "clean house and give the new Superintendent a chance." [40]

Rogers' superintendency is chiefly noted for the building of Trail Ridge Road. There were several reasons for seeking to provide an alternate route to the Fall River Road, not the least of which was the fact that for years, tourists had figuratively with good cause been "scared to death" while traveling over the latter. A ranger was regularly stationed on the road to drive the cars of frightened visitors through various dangerous switchbacks. [41] So since the mid-1920's Park Service officials had considered the possibility of constructing a less hazardous way to traverse the Park. They had ruled out the possibility of widening the old road, for its grades were much steeper than those used on a normal highway. Some sections had grades up to 15 percent, while six percent was the ordinary highway maximum. Clearly the Fall River Road could not be satisfactorily modernized. Therefore, in August of 1926, S. A. Wallace of the Bureau of Public Roads was ordered to take a crew of ten men to chart a location for a new road over Trail Ridge. [42] After they accomplished their mission, there was an understandable delay, due to the road cession debate, before the Bureau believed it could take the next step of calling for bids, by the spring of 1929, on the first section of the $1.5 million Park road project. It would run from Deer Ridge through Hidden Valley along the "Long Trail Ridge" to Fall River Pass, where it would join the old Fall River Road. [43]

As it turned out, there was further delay until the jurisdiction question was resolved, but when that was settled, Congress made a first appropriation of $450,000 for Trail Ridge in April 1929. The contract for the eastern part of the project was awarded in the autumn of that year to W. A. Colt of Las Animas, Colorado. Colt was a 72-year-old veteran of railroad and ditch construction. He had maintained a camp at Glacier Basin campground since the completion of his surfacing contract on the Bear Lake Road, in anticipation of the Trail Ridge contract. He immediately set up a base camp at Hidden Valley and began construction in October. [44] The camp structures were built so they could be moved by trucks without dismantling. The locations of the camps were, in every instance, selected with the view to minimizing the damage to the scenic properties along the road. [45]

Local enthusiasm for the project was high, although sometimes false hopes were raised as to the utility of the new road. For instance, the Estes Park Trail optimistically predicted that when completed the road would be kept open all winter, since "it will be practically free from the drifts which early obstruct the present Fall River Road." [46] In any case, Colt and his men experienced exceptional luck in the mild Colorado winter of 1929-30. Not until March 16 was he forced to shut down work, and then only until April 7. Park Service officials were encouraged by Colt's progress, and by May, Park Service Director Horace M. Albright announced that a second contract, of $500,000, would be awarded within the year.

In so doing, he expressed the opinion that, "the Rocky Mountain National Park no longer is the 'stepchild' of the national parks system." [47]

By early fall Colt's progress was slowed as he began drilling operations at the Rock Cut area above the forest-line. At 11,000 feet, high winds and snowstorms buffeted men and machines. The frozen tundra forced engineers to perfect new drills to penetrate the surface. The bitter cold and the high altitude made breathing difficult and heavy labor almost impossible. Colt's average work-force consisted of about 185 workers, most of whom were laborers. One old-timer later recalled that in fact three crews were kept busy—one working, one leaving and one on the way. [48] Despite the construction difficulties Colt and his men had completed 55 percent of their seventeen and two-tenths mile project by the end of September 1930.

While Colt supervised construction on the east side of the Park, another contractor, L. T. Lawler of Butte, Montana, began operations on the west side on October 8, 1930. Lawler's project extended for nearly 11 miles from Fall River Pass, where it tied into Colt's construction, to the floor of the Colorado River valley. It crossed the Continental Divide at Milner Pass at an elevation of 10,754 feet. The line of the road followed a new location from Fall River Pass to Milner Pass. From that point to Far View Curve the line followed the old road and practically obliterated it for that distance. From Far View Curve to the end of Lawler's project the new road traversed an entirely new location. [49]

The severe winter of 1930-31 inhibited both contractors. Lawler closed operations for the winter on November 26, while Colt struggled on with a crew of twenty until January. Since most of the remaining work on the east side had to be done above timberline, snow and frost conditions at that altitude made it impossible for Colt to resume operations until mid-June. Lawler, still working at lower elevations, resumed operations in early May.

All of the contract work was performed under the direction of W. L. Lafferty, United States Highway engineer, who endeavored to prevent the marring of the area's natural beauty. For example, when ever blasting threw "country" rock across the landscape, the contractors carefully removed the debris. [50] At the foot of long slopes, logs were placed in such a manner that all material could be retained within the limits of the staked area. When logs were not available, windrows of rocks were used. At the Rock Cut near the high point of the road, a lattice work of heavy poles was constructed by Colt to protect natural rock pillars and the age-old lichens on them. [51]

The obvious caution exercised by the contractors did not unduly slow down their operations. By the time the 1931 fall snows shut down construction, Colt's men had completed 95 percent of their project in 94 percent of the allotted time. Lawler, meanwhile, had finished 65 percent of his project in 45 percent of his time. [52] Colt's progress made it possible to open the east side of the Trail Ridge Road to traffic on July 16, 1932, and early in August travel was permitted on the west side over that portion of the road from Fall River Pass to Poudre Lakes. [53]

A contract to surface the entire project was awarded that year to an Albuquerque firm, and a

year later a Denver contractor was authorized to build approximately eight miles of road on the west side of the Park. Construction on this section started near the Phantom Valley Ranch and proceeded in a southerly direction along the floor of the Colorado River valley. [54] Then on October 28, 1934, a contract was let to the same concern for laying an oil mat on approximately 32 miles of road, beginning at the Fall River entrance and extending to the floor of the river valley on the west side. [55] During the summer of 1935, the Trail Ridge Road was given the "finishing touches" of a plant-mix bituminous surfacing. Except for some minor work yet required, work on this "wonder road" had been completed.

The finished road had been constructed to a width of 24 feet, from shoulder to shoulder, with additional widening on curves. Grades were limited to seven percent, and curvatures to a 200 foot radius on blind curves and a 100 foot radius on open curves. [56] Today, the Trail Ridge Road connects the Fall River and Thompson River entrances, on the east side of the Park, with the Grand Lake entrance on the west side. Eleven miles of this road lie above 11,000 feet, while four miles of it rise above 12,000 feet. It reaches a maximum elevation of 12,183 feet just above Iceberg Lake. [57]

The Trail Ridge project was a triumph of human ingenuity and perseverance. While the men on the job deserved and received the admiration of the public, park administrators working behind the scenes shouldered the ultimate responsibility for success or failure. Superintendent Rogers handled all of the construction details after the contract stage. He walked the "line" of the road about 20 times before construction began. Furthermore, he was instrumental in changing the course of the road through Rock Cut and other scenic spots so that millions of visitors would be offered breathtaking mountain views. [58]

The Estes Park Trail in September 1931, prophesied accurately when it said

> These men are building an enduring monument to themselves in the name of beauty and of the spectacular. There is no other road in the entire world that will compare with it. [59]

ENDNOTES

1. Carothers, Estes Park: Past and Present, pp. 56-57.

2. Ibid., pp. 57-58.

3. Shoemaker, "Story of Estes-Rocky Mountain National Park Region," p. 44.

4. Carothers, Estes Park: Past and Present, pp. 59-60.

5. Shoemaker, "Story of Estes-Rocky Mountain National Park Region," p. 46.

6. Supervisor's Annual Reports, 1915-1930, pp. 4-5. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

7. Supervisor's Monthly Report, September 1915, "Monthly Reports, 1915-1918," p. 2. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

8. The Denver Post, June 15, 1931.

9. Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1917, "Monthly Reports, 1915-1918," pp. 4-5. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

10. Ibid., March 1918, p. 4.

11. Superintendent's Annual Report, 1918, "Annual Reports, 1915-1930," p. 9. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

12. Ibid., 1919, pp. 15-16.

13. Letter from Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane to Secretary of Treasury, Carter Glass, May 23, 1919; found in Rogers, "History of Legislation." Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

14. Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 1919, "Monthly Reports, 1919-1923," p. 4. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

15. Ibid., May 1919, pp. 4-5.

16. Superintendent's Annual Report, 1920, "Annual Reports, 1915-1930," pp. 11-13. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

17. John Ise, Our National Parks (Baltimore, 1961), p. 217.

18. Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1921, "Monthly Reports, 1919-1923," p. 1. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

19. Ibid., March 1922, p. 3.

20. Estes Park Trail, April 7, 1922.

21. Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1922, "Monthly Reports, 1919-1923," p. 8. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

22. Estes Park Trail, August 25, 1922.

23. Ibid., August 3, 1923.

24. Ibid.

25. Rocky Mountain News, April 2, 1924.

26. Ibid., April 4, 1924.

27. Western Highways Builder, June 1924.

28. The following is a summary of the monies spent on the construction and maintenance of trails and roads in Rocky Mountain National Park, 1916-1925.

	Roads		Trails	
	Construction	Maintenance	Construction	Maintenance
1916	$ 2,500	---	---	---
1917	---	$ 600	---	---
1919	---	717	---	---
1920	299	980	---	---
1921	---	13,970	---	$ 838
1922	25,000	11,250	---	2,819
1923	10,000	20,797	---	1,600
1924	---	18,750	---	2,000
1925	15,000	22,500	$3,500	3,000

Statement by Roger W. Toll, undated, Colorado vs. Toll correspondence. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

29. Superintendent's Annual Report, 1925, "Annual Reports, 1915-1930," pp. 2B-3B. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

30. Estes Park Trail, September 25, 1925.

31. Superintendent's Annual Report, 1925, "Annual Reports, 1915-1930," p. 11. Rocky Mountain National Park Library; and Engineering News-Record, October 2, 1924; and Rocky Mountain News, May 28, 1925; June 14, 1925.

32. Estes Park Trail, July 17, 1925.

33. Roger W. Toll, "Road Work in Rocky Mountain National Park," Colorado Highways (January 1926), p. 12.

34. Rocky Mountain News, July 28, 1927.

35. Ibid., June 8, 1930.

36. The Denver Post, January 27, 1929.

37. Author's interview with Edmund Rogers, July 13, 1964.

38. Rogers approached the challenge as "just another adventure." Officials at the Colorado National Bank evidently thought his adventuresome spirit was temporary, for they kept Rogers on a leave basis for several years, certain that he would return. Rogers, however, stayed with the Park Service even though this first position cost him a cut in salary. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Estes Park Trail, August 20, 1926.

43. The Denver Post, October 14, 1928.

44. Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1929, "Monthly Reports, 1927-1929." Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

45. Anna L. Newsom, "Trail Ridge Road . . . in Rocky Mountain National Park," The Highway Magazine, XXVII, (April 1936), p. 76.

46. Estes Park Trail, November 1, 1929.

47. Rocky Mountain News, May 8, 1930.

48. Included in Colt's work force were six foremen, eight shovel operators, eight oilers, five cooks, three blacksmiths, two mechanics, and one hundred and fifty laborers. For equipment, he had five gas shovels, one Ingersoll-Rand compressor, four portable compressors, three tractors, three blades, twenty trucks, and eight horses. Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1930, "Monthly Reports, 1930-1931," pp. 4-5. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

49. Superintendent's Annual Report, 1932, "Annual Reports, 1931 1953," pp. 12-13. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

50. Great charges of dynamite were used to loosen rock, with blasts fired in sets of thirty. One charge near the summit contained 178 shots, totaling more than a half a ton of powder. Estes Park Trail, September 18, 1931.

51. Ibid.

52. Superintendent's Monthly Report, November 1931, "Monthly Reports, 1930-1931," p. 3. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

53. Ibid., August 4, 1932.

54. Superintendent's Annual Report, 1936, "Annual Reports, 1931 1953," p. 13. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.

55. Ibid.

56. Newsom, "Trail Ridge Road," p. 77

57. "National Parks (United States)," Collier's Encyclopedia, 8th edition, XVII, p. 182.

58. Author's interview with Edmund Rogers, July 13, 1964.

59. Estes Park Trail, September 18, 1931.